



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-5926

NEWS RELEASE

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Ross Mason
(208) 869-1751

ACCESS CARD GIVEN OK BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT — ENROLLMENT UNDER WAY NOW

Idaho's Access Card program to aid parents in purchasing private health insurance got a nod of approval by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services today. Eligible parents may begin enrolling their children immediately.

Access Card is part of the CHIP B/Access Card program launched in July to assist low income working parents in getting health insurance for their children. Access Card had been in a "holding pattern" while federal officials reviewed it to see if it met federal requirements. Children who signed up for the Access Card were given the option to obtain temporary health insurance through the CHIP B Medicaid program. Families who have already applied for Access Card coverage will be sent information packets giving them instructions on what they need to do now that the program has official federal approval.

"We're very happy that we've cleared this hurdle. It means families who prefer private insurance to CHIP B now have the opportunity to get a health policy that more closely meets their needs," says Idaho CHIP Director Robin Pewtress.

In approving the Access Card, Medicare Administrator Dr. Mark McClellan said, "Idaho has targeted CHIP resources to populations with income at or below 185 percent of poverty to maximize private health insurance coverage options. Congratulations on your innovative approach to expanding health insurance coverage."

Currently, there are about 1,200 Idaho children using the CHIP B/Access Card program. Another 1,000 applications are being reviewed to determine eligibility.

The Access Card is a premium assistance program for families who prefer to obtain health coverage through a private insurance company or through their employer. Income can be up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. A family using the Access Card receives up to \$100 per child per month (maximum of \$300 per family) to help purchase insurance.

CHIP B is low cost health coverage for Idaho children who don't have insurance and don't qualify for Idaho Medicaid or regular CHIP. Income can be up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. CHIP B costs \$15 per child each month. Children up to age 19 may be included in coverage.

Families interested in signing up for the insurance can obtain an application or additional information by calling the Idaho Careline at 2-1-1 or 1-800-926-2588, or by going to this web site: <http://www.idahohealth.org>. Parents may also contact the CHIP Unit directly at 1-866-326-2485 toll free.

(Editors: For additional information contact Ross Mason in Boise at 869-1751)